

4) *The five (contaminated) aggregates are vessels of the suffering of change*

Our present mind and body are also responsible for us undergoing the suffering of change. As explained before, whatever samsaric happiness we experience, it cannot last and inevitably transforms into some form of misery. It is in the nature of our aggregates that whatever pleasure or happiness arises has a limit and cannot be sustained. Eventually it will change into dissatisfaction and displeasure. Our present mind and body are contaminated because they are under the control of ignorance, other delusions and karma. Those delusions and karma are the causes and conditions of all our problems and difficulties. Therefore, the moment we are born with our contaminated aggregates we carry the potential to experience suffering.

Our mind-body complex is compared to an open wound, sensitive to touch and always ready to hurt. Our *pleasant* experiences are like putting cool water on the wound which temporarily relieves the pain. However, as long as one has an open wound, pleasant relief from the pain cannot last and will inevitably change back into pain. Therefore, even if for the time being we are happy and content, circumstances can easily change and transform our happiness into dissatisfaction and misery.

Even though our pleasurable experiences induce desire and attachment, there is nothing in any of these experiences that has an essential nature of pleasure. Contaminated pleasant feelings arise from the temporary relief from suffering. They are a mere lightening of the burden which are then labelled "happiness". It is only in comparison to previous feelings of displeasure and pain that we call the temporary absence of those feelings "happiness".

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment***:

Moreover, your current pleasant feelings – which cause attachment to grow – mostly arise only upon the relief of suffering; pleasure does not exist naturally, independently of the removal of suffering. For example, if you suffer because of too much walking, a pleasant state of mind arises when you sit down. Then, as the earlier intense suffering fades, pleasure appears to arise gradually. Yet sitting is not naturally pleasant, because if you sit too long, suffering arises again, just as before. Suppose that sitting and other postures were causes of pleasure by their nature. Just as suffering increases in proportion to your involvement with causes of suffering, so should pleasure increase the longer you walk, sit, lie down, drink or eat, or stand in the sun or shade. However, it is clear that if you do any of these for too long, suffering is all that results.

Buddha says in the ***Sutra for Nanda for Entering the Womb***:

Nanda, the physical activities of walking, sitting, standing, or lying down must each be understood as suffering. If meditators analyse the nature of these physical activities, they will see that if they spend the day walking and do not rest, sit down, or lie down, they will experience walking exclusively as suffering and will experience intense, sharp, unbearable and unpleasant feelings. The notion that walking is pleasant will not arise.

After explaining the other three physical activities of sitting etc. in the same way, the Buddha continues:

Nevertheless, Nanda, because they break the continuity of suffering in one or the other of the physical activities, some other, new suffering arises; and this they take to be pleasure. Nanda, when this contaminated feeling of pleasure arises, it is only suffering that is arising; when it ends, it is only this nature of suffering that ends. When it arises yet again, it is only the compositional activity that arises; when it ends, it is only compositional activity that ends.

The examples given here mainly refer to the body, in that they demonstrate that certain physical activities may initially provide us with physical happiness and well-being. However, that happiness is only temporary, for our body is under the control of karma and delusion; it is like an open wound and thus in the nature of suffering. Therefore, physical happiness is merely the temporary absence of physical suffering.

Examples that are related to the mind demonstrate that certain mental activities may in the same way initially provide us with mental peace and well-being. For instance, remembering a joyful event may make us feel happy and satisfied. However, since our mind is equally under the control of karma and delusions, since it is also like an open wound and thus in the nature of suffering, the initial pleasant feeling is only a temporary relief from suffering and thus will inevitably change into an unpleasant feeling of, for example, boredom and tediousness.

This explains why, no matter how blissful and happy we feel upon getting or achieving something we yearned for, that happiness is only short-lived and quickly replaced by boredom and dissatisfaction.

Aryadeva says in his **Four Hundred Stanzas**:

*For pleasure, when it increases,
Is seen to change into its opposite.
When pain increases,
It does not similarly change into its opposite.*

- 5) *The five (contaminated) aggregates are in the nature of (pervasive) compositional suffering*
The very existence of our five aggregates constitutes pervasive compositional suffering because our aggregates are conditioned by karma and delusions. In fact, anything that is conditioned by karma and delusions is in the nature of pervasive compositional suffering.
Therefore, having the wound of those aggregates we can temporarily find some relief by taking pain killers, or can make it flair up in pain by applying an irritant like chilli. However, the wound of the aggregates itself is the basis of the other experiences of relief and pain. At the same time it also gives rise to a future wound and thus to unwanted future pain.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his **Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment**:

In the same way that someone bearing a heavy burden cannot be happy as long as the burden must be borne, you too will suffer so long as you carry the burden of the appropriated aggregates. Though you have occasional moments when painful feeling is absent, because the aggregates are firmly embedded in the dysfunctional tendencies of suffering and the afflictions, compositional suffering is still present, and therefore myriad sufferings are just on the verge of arising in countless ways. Therefore, since compositional suffering pervades all suffering and is the root of the other two types of suffering; meditate on it often in order to become disenchanted with it.

Pervasive compositional suffering is very subtle and extremely difficult to comprehend. We are so enmeshed in our attachment to cyclic existence, in our attachment to this present psycho-physical complex and to our imagined inherently existent "I" that it requires great determination and effort to understand the third type of suffering.

The **Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma** says:

*When one hair from the palm of the hand
Goes to the eye,
There will be discomfort and suffering.
The childish, like the palm of the hand,
Are not aware of the hair of pervasive suffering.
The saintly are like the eye,
And will feel the pervasive suffering.*

However, only if we realize how our entire samsaric existence is pervaded by this subtle nature of misery, can we realize the first of the four noble truths and thus effectively generate renunciation. It is seeing the deep, inescapable, all-pervasive suffering nature of *everything* in cyclic existence that inspires the sincere wish to overcome our contaminated aggregates and achieve liberation.

Another category of suffering is that of the six types of suffering, a reflection on which necessitates a reflection on past and future lives:

1. The suffering of uncertainty
2. The suffering of insatiability
3. The suffering of having to give up our bodies repeatedly
4. The suffering of repeated rebirth
5. The suffering of repeatedly descending from high to low
6. The suffering of having no companions

The suffering of uncertainty

There is no certainty regarding the relationships we have with other people. Good friends become enemies and enemies become friends. Those that like and respect us today may set out to harm us tomorrow.